

Hindu Sociology

Binoy Kumar Sarkar and *Sukraniti*

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Introduction

Writing in 1922, Benoy Kumar Sarkar remarked that, “Sociology is much too popular a category in present day world culture. Unluckily, however, this category has as many contents as there are sociologists” (Positive Background), p.1). Since the days of classical school or culture-sociology of Comte and Spencer, “the subject-matter of sociology has changed so much and so often with researchers that it was almost impossible to describe what this discipline is and what it is not” (*ibid.*, p. 2). He went on to add that a student of classical, encyclopaedic, historical or cultural sociology, would hardly recognize any sociology in the work of the founders of “new sociology” like Tonnies and Durkheim etc. (*ibid.*)

A hundred years later, the debates are still on about what sociology refers to, what society should be understood to mean, and what this means for developing and using appropriate methodology. Sociology is therefore a field both characterised by, and to a large extent generated and reproduced by, variations between different schools of thought, and associated methodological orientations, as to what society ‘is’ and how to study it, ranging from positivist approaches using large-scale quantitative methods, to interpretive readings of texts and ethnographic studies of small-scale groups. There is no consensus on which classical sociological authors and paradigms – including Marxist, Weberian, Durkhemian, Simmelian and Symbolic Interactionist streams, as well as the sociologies of culture proposed by Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim – constitute living traditions today.

What we are experiencing in sociology can be better understood as a recognition of the empirical, theoretical, methodological, and ontological limits of existing intellectual frameworks. As other social scientists, an increasing number of sociologists declare the inadequacy of their theoretical tools to address the problems confronting them. (Inglis, 2016). This ambiguity and uncertainty in the field of sociology can also be seen as an opportunity to enhance its richness and creativity. Permeable boundaries of sociology provide space for creative work, particularly from scholars of non-western world who have so far been passive consumers of intellectual exports from the western world and have excelled mainly in ‘apemanship and parrotry’ of the knowledge traditions of the west. It indicates, in short, a paradigm shift.

The recent 'cultural turn' in sociology provides a window for such a 'strong program' (Alexander, 2021). It takes two forms: the 'epistemological' case in which culture is seen as universally constitutive of social relations and identities; and the 'historical' case in which culture is seen as playing an unprecedented role in constituting social relations. The cultural turn is not just an adaptation to changing social conditions nor is it a retreat from the core of social theory. It is rather a reconstitution of the sociological project, a transformation of its ontology.

Social science theory has so far primarily sought a science of means, logically analyzing the ways in which the means are distributed or deployed, instrumentalizing means as sources of power. The ends remain either exogenous and unanalyzed so far. As Einstein put it, "Pure logical thinking cannot yield us any knowledge of the empirical world; all knowledge of reality starts from experience and ends in it...In a certain sense, therefore, I hold it that pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients dreamed". (Einstein, 271-274).

The paradigm shift towards cultural sociology provides the space for Indian scholars to focus on sociology as science of society that includes study of both ends and means. There is a popular misconception that India's knowledge tradition is mostly restricted to disciplines that involve imagination. Nothing can be farther from the truth. India's knowledge as contained in what is perhaps the world's largest body of philosophical texts, is primarily and essentially empirical and closely interwoven with the lived lives of people. Thought about both what is observable and what can only be intuitively experienced has produced Indian knowledge tradition which is based on *ādhyatmic* *vidyās* and also physical sciences dealing with the material reality, the earth and the cosmos.

Political System

Sarkar's translation of *Sukraniti* remains one of the most authoritative English versions of this classic text. His book *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology*, is based on the materials collected for the analytical study of *Sukraniti*. Since *Sukraniti* is a text in the category of a *Nitisashtra*, *Arthashastra*, *Dharmashastra*, or *Dharmasutra* it deals mainly with the topics implied by such Hindu categories as *Dharma* (morals), *Artha* (interests) and *Kama* (desires and passions) as opposed to *Moksha* (salvation). (*Positive Background*, p.5).

Both *Sukraniti* and *Positive Background* reveal Sarkar's keen insight into the principles of strong and good government and political wisdom that find place in Hindu texts of the time. These works are based on the principle that the security of the State depends not on the passive virtue of obedience to the laws promulgated by it but on the active co-operation of the people with it in carrying these laws into effect. The structure and

functioning of the Hindu political system of these times has many points which have anticipated the latest principles of good administration and which have yet to be realised by modern States. (*Sukraniti*, p.39-40).

The greatest of all dangers to social peace and political security is the existence of conflicts, disunions, rivalry and party spirit. The bond of civil society is torn asunder when the moral system is disrupted. Hence the greatest political offender and the most criminal sinner is he who by his conduct promotes the breach between those who should normally live in amity and peace. The general violence of criminal activity in hindu jurisprudence is seen as the most insidious threat to the order of law.

The main problem with violence is less the injury it causes to some person or group than the threat it poses to the state or other legal authority. *Sukraniti* provides against such offences by the socio-political decree issued by the king. (*Sukraniti*, p. 40). “According to the dictates of *Sukraniti* the execution of bad men is real *ahimsa* i.e., mercy. One is deserted by good people and acquires sins by always not punishing those ought to be punished, and punishing those who ought not to be, and by being a severe punisher”. (*ibid.* p. 131).

A state is a state because it can coerce, restrain, compel. Eliminate control or the coercive element from social life, and the state as an entity vanishes. Danda is the very essence of statal relations. No danda, no state. A sanctionless state is a contradiction in terms. The absence of danda is tanta- mount to *matsya-nyaya* or the state of nature. It is clear also that property and dharma do not exist in that non-state. These entities can have their roots only in the state. The whole theory thus consists of three fundamental rules : no danda, no stat; no state, no dharma; and no state, no individuality and property. (Political Institutions, p. 197).

For Sarkar, *Danda* in hindu law emphasizes rectitude and deterrence over retribution. In fact, *danda* in the hindu view is what makes law practical at all as it contains a recognition of human imperfection and fallibility. Law in its fullest sense can only exist in the world if *danda* is there to correct the inevitable failings of human beings. Without *danda*, law remains an elusive ideal to which no one can aspire. With *danda* law becomes *satya*, the truth that upholds social and individual righteousness. *Danda* simultaneously guarantees the overall stability of the social system and development of the individual.

Sarkar sees *danda* as a two edged sword that cuts both ways. On the one hand it is a corrective of social abuses, a moralizer purifier and civilizing agent. As the *Sukraniti* says it is by the administration of *danda* that the State can be saved from a reversion to *matsyanyaya* and utter annihilation and it is by *danda* the people are set on the right path and they become virtuous and refrain from committing aggression or indulging in

untruths. *Danda* is efficacious moreover in causing the cruel to become mild and the wicked to give up wickedness. It is good also for preceptors and can bring them to their senses should they happen to be addicted to an extra dose of vanity or unmindful of their own vocations. Finally it is the foundation of civic life, being the ‘great stay of all virtues’ and all the ‘methods and means of statecraft’ would be fruitless without a judicious exercise of *danda*. Its use as a beneficent agency in social life is therefore unequivocally recommended by Sukra. (Basic Ideas, p. 513-14).

But on the other hand *danda* is also a most potent instrument of restrain the ruler himself, to the powers that be. The maladmmistration of *danda* says Kamandaka leads to the fall of the ruler. Manu ls does not hesitate to declare that *danda* would smite the king who deviates from his duty from his ‘station in life’. It would smite his relatives too together with his castles territories and possessions. The common weal depends therefore on the proper exercise of the *danda*. Manu would not allow any ill disciplined man to be the administrator of *danda*. The greatest amount of wisdom accruing from the help of councillors and others is held to be the essential precondition for the handling of this instrument. And here is available the logical check on the eventual absolutism of the *danda dhara* (punisher) in the Hindu theory of sovereignty. (ibid.).

In the two edged sword of the *danda* then we encounter on the one side interests of the State and on the other morality, virtue, dharma, etc. In fact, it is to ‘educate’ man out of the primitive licence and beastly freedom that government has been instituted. The State is designed to correct human vices or restrain them and open out the avenues to a fuller and higher life. And all this is possible only because of *danda*. The conception of this eternal co-relation in societal existence is one of the profoundest contributions of the political philosophy of the Hindus to human thought. This concept changes the emphasis from what law restrains to what law enables. It suggests that every legal system must contain morals and ethical elements which can be understood in religious terms. (ibid.).

“In accordance with the doctrine of *danda*, the state is conceived as a pedagogic institution or moral laboratory, so to speak. It is an organization in and through which men's natural vices are purged, and it thereby becomes an effective means to the general uplifting of mankind. The Hindu theorists therefore consider the state to be an institution “necessary” to the human race if man is not to grovel in the condition of *matsya-nyaya* under the law of beasts. Man, if he is to be man, cannot do without political organization. He must have a state and must submit to sanction, coercion and punishment — in a word, to *danda*”. (Political Institutions, p.203).

Kingship, however divine and absolute in theory, supplies, so far as these and other conditions are mentioned, practically all the advantages of self-rule and government by the Many. The most rigid enforcement of obligations and duties from, side by side with

the most lavish grant of rights and privileges to, both the governor and the governed explain the seeming inconsistency and paradox that characterise the Hindu political system, and the great discrepancy between the theoretically despotic and the practically democratic features of the political organisation. This is a sound political maxim and is based on the observation of the fact that the peoples' interests and opinions do in most cases differ from the report and opinions of the servants of the State. Hence in cases of conflict between the two, the king should take the peoples' point of view. (*Sukraniti*, p.51).

Happiness of the people is the sole consideration for a king. Hence his interests must ever be identified with those of the people. And in deciding upon measures he should be guided by the truth 'voice of people is voice of god' Thus though the king is himself a god, the god of the king is the people. And, in fact, the king has been described in *Sukraniti* as their servant getting remuneration for his work. The peculiar dualism and antithesis in the king's position have been very unhesitatingly indicated. (*ibid.*).

The king is a god no doubt, but Hindu sociology does not consider him infallible. The limitations are fully recognised, and moral as well as constitutional restrictions are imposed upon him as upon other men. The Theory of the Divine Right of Monarchs has therefore to be understood with great modifications and the notions of Europeans about the infallibility and divinity of Kings and Popes must not be imported into the study of Hindu Socio-political institutions. (*Sukraniti*, p.54). The theory that a man may be omniscient is rejected altogether for the very nature of the case goes against the idea. To the argument of physical magnitude, extensity and vastness of political interests is added that of intellectual limitations and incapability of man. Man cannot be omnipresent, he cannot also be omniscient, and therefore he must never be made omnipotent. (*ibid.*, p.56).

The polity described in *Sukraniti* is formally monarchical; but it recognises only such ministers as ideal as are not merely 'king's friends' or 'king's men' working like his private secretaries or confidential clerks, but have an individuality and independence of character by which they can control the whims and caprices of the monarch and systematically govern the course of the state's action. The Priest who is superior to all other ministers, must be well versed in mantras and rituals, master of the three sciences, skilful at work, conqueror of the senses, subduer of anger, devoid of greed and passions, equipped with a knowledge of six Vedangas and of the science of archery with all its branches, one who knows the science of moral as well as religious interests. (*Sukraniti*, p.69).

All candidates must pass through the process of examination and selection. Anybody and everybody is not to be appointed to any post. The selected candidate must be able to satisfy the employer in the particular points enumerated. Considerations of birth and

family are important no doubt, but these are not the sole points to be brought out in selecting persons for public offices. That is, in purely social functions, race, caste, birth, etc., have to be most seriously considered. But when the question is of appointment to political offices these considerations should weigh very little to the master or officer in charge. (*Sukraniti*, p.65).

The differentiation of the executive into so many departments each with its own functions and own chief indicates a highly organised political fabric. The statement of qualifications required of each minister is also the product of a deep insight into the functions of the state. The picture thus presented is not one of a simple primitive political life in which the man in the street' is fit to be a judge, a warrior and a ruler by turn, but one of a complex organization which requires specialized functionaries for the efficient discharge of its functions and hence demands of each a specialized training as Judge, Commander, Financier, etc. (*Sukraniti*, p.70).

A careful study of the functions of the State as suggested in *Sukraniti* leads to the conviction that the Hindus were not a nation of dreamers and philosophers, but were practical men who understood their national and temporal interests keenly and knew how to protect and develop them wisely. It is an error to suppose that the Hindus were a "pre-political" and "pro-economic" people or even that they were an essentially non-political or non-economic race. Political insight, the study of public interests, concerted efforts for material prosperity and discussions about the common welfare were integral features of Hindu national life. (*Sukraniti*, p.42-43.).

In this context we may refer to a poem that Sarkar wrote on Asoka as an outstanding example of Hindu ideal of coexistence and of power and peace:

Was Asoka but an ascetic king,
That grand monarch of a united Ind?
Let us see : was it not he that followed close
Kautilya's Machiavellian code?
Did the "Artha-shastra's" teachings inspire
Self-mortification in princely flesh?
Had he not drunk of Shookracharya's lore
That finds in politics the highest art?
To Central Asia his men he sent,
Bearers of his own and empire's names;
Syria, Greece, Macedon, Epirus,
Egypt and Kyrene also heard the same.
The world's gifts he brought into his own land,

At Patalipootra the Hindus learnt Greek;
 Medical doctors he despatched far West
 And his ambassadors to the great powers.
 As sovereign universal he summoned
 All rulers to Dhamma's supreme control;
 What was that Dhamma? Not a creed of retreat
 From the world, but India's message of life.
 Let us see : was it not he that inscribed
 His commands on rocks all ages to guide?
 Surely he enjoyed the majestic sway
 And domestic bliss as earthly king!
 If such the self-less renunciation be
 Of which hermits' spiritual souls are made.
 Were not the Caesers and Fredericks quietists then,
 Tang Tai-tsung, Napoleon, and Peter?

(The Bliss of A Moment, p. 91)

Social Cohesion

Sarkar realized that the whole culture of Hindu India, its methodology and its achievements have been really compressed into *Sukraniti* and have contributed to its making. "For the moderns it is of inestimable value as "lifting the brain-cap" of mediaeval India and letting them "see the thoughts" that were moving in her educated mind". As a text-book of sociology, politics and economics, the *Sukraniti* is thus really a study of Hindu positivism, the human, social and worldly elements in Hindu national life and culture, the place of earthly things, *samsara*, *bhoga*, desires, passions and attachments in the Hindu scheme of human existence, in short, it is a study of the positive background and foundations of Hindu sociology, as opposed to its transcendental foreground and the superstructure. (ibid., p.16).

Sukraniti is seen by Sarkar as a synthetic, comprehensive and generalized science (or rather art) of society, equivalent to Sociology in its wide sense, and hence should be considered equivalent to neither Ethics nor a treatise on Polity, but a system of social , economic, and political ideals. The scopes of this science or art must be wide enough in order that it may offer practical advice as to social welfare. It is a recognised principle in modern times that neither Public finance, nor Economics, nor Political Science, by itself, is competent to be a guide on the art of living. *Niti Sastra* is specially useful to the rulers for they hold in their hands the organization of the peoples, and hence the learning that is calculated to promote human happiness has to be carefully mastered by them. (*Sukraniti*, p.2)

Three uses of *Sukraniti* are mentioned by Sarkar and these indicate three aspects of social life, and hence three branches of the science. In the first place, this science or art can help formulate policies about people, allies and neutrals, and establish national and international measures. In the second place, it suggests the arts of winning over the heart of people and perform the work of psychology and ethics by studying human interests and motives as well as the ways of dealing with men. In the third place, it offers lessons on diplomacy and political activities in general by which one can be an able pilot of the ship of state. (*ibid.*).

Sukraniti is also seen as a very comprehensive work as all Hindu social and human treatises are. As such it deals with all matters that directly or indirectly concern the main subject, viz., the promotion of human and social welfare. The various sciences and practical arts connected with the life- religion, history, habits, habitats, food, diseases, external and internal characteristics have all been laid under consideration in this treatise, and the account is incidentally suggestive of the vast knowledge of the world that the Hindus displayed in the specialised treatises on *Dharma*, *Nyaya*, and *Artha*. (*Sukraniti*, p.233). In the Indian knowledge tradition, “no one hypothesis or theory dominated Hindu thought in any age, or monopolized the researches of all investigators in successive epochs. The intellectual universe of the Hindus was “pluralistic.” There were different schools criticizing, correcting, and modifying one another’s enquiries. The story of scientific investigation among the Hindus is thus the story of a growth and development in critical inquiry, sceptical attitude, and rationalism”. (Creative India, p. 21-22).

In the study of Indian sociology, Sarkar believed that modern scholarship has to be devoted more and more to the exposition of the influence that the masses of the country have ever exerted in the making of its civilization. The masses and the folk have contributed to the making of Hindu Culture in all its phases no less than the court and the classes. Social, material and political interests, as contrasted with the other-worldly and spiritual ideals, have had considerable influence in moulding Hindu life and thought. Sarkar saw it as a sign of the times that with this recognition a need has been felt of greater recourse to vernacular literature as an important source of information. However, a systematic work utilizing these vernacular evidences has yet to be attempted.

Sarkar observes that the caste-system has never been a disintegrating factor in Hindu social existence, and is most probably a very recent institution. Hinduism is an eclectic and ever-expansive socio-religious system built up through the assimilation of diverse ethnic, natural and spiritual forces during the successive ages of Indian history. There has ever been an attempt to integrate the folk-customs, popular faith, image-worship and public festivals with the transcendental conceptions of the divinity of man and the transitoriness of this World.

Sarkar was of the view that the study of castes has to be undertaken from a thoroughly new angle, viz., that of the influence of political disruption on social and economic transformation. When the caste system is thus studied as a branch of the socio-political history of the people of India, it would be found that the facts of the present day socio-economic and socio-religious system cannot be carried back beyond a certain age. The attempt to understand Vedic, post-Vedic, Budhist, Maurya, Kushan, Gupta, and even Pala, and Chola societies according to the conventions of the Caste- system known today is thoroughly misleading. Under these circumstances both the orthodox metaphysical Doctrine of intellectual ‘ fitness ’ as the regulative principle of caste-distinction, as well as the doctrinaire Social- Reform -theory of Equality of Rights are equally irrelevant and un- historical.

Sarkar believed that it is an open question how far the four-fold division of society in authoritative works down to that time was a “legal fiction,” and to what extent and in what sense it was an actual institution. The customs were always local and were never codified into fixed cakes as in the 19th century; The vertical as well as horizontal mobility of the population was greater under feudal than modern conditions. In case of socio-economic transformation the new orders have tried to preserve the old “legal fiction” by affiliating themselves to the traditional orders. The economic aspect of the castes as occupational grades, and the auxiliary religious aspect must be regarded as an appendix, to the political-cum-military treatment of the subject.

Decades later, M.N. Sriniwas was to say that, “The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by Sanskritising its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahmanic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden”. (Sriniwas, p. 30).

Laws preventing undue use or abuse of the public places and other works of public utility indicate, in the first place, the highly complex administrative organisation to be followed by the king, and secondly, the vast number of such temples and parks, wells and roads scattered throughout the kingdom necessitated the passing of a separate law or at any rate their consideration as an important item of the public interests of the State. The rule regarding the disabled and the unfortunates is purely humanitarian. (*Sukraniti*, p.40).

All practices and professions for reasons of public safety, social peace and future interests of the parties concerned should be endorsed by the State, and received a royal

patent, charter or license to testify to their bona fide character. The state, according' to *Sukraniti*, must interfere even on the principle of individualistic welfare. However highly philosophers and theorists might praise the principles of non-intervention in social affairs, Sarkar says that statesmen and pillars of states have uniformly adopted in practice the principles and practices of social welfare, and been compelled to enlarge the functions of their States even against their own abstract conceptions. (*Sukraniti*, p.40).

Worship of images is mentioned in *Sukraniti* as only a means to an end. The image is the concrete embodiment of the divinity and helps the mind to fix itself on it by meditation. The characteristic of an image is its power of helping forward contemplation and yoga. The human maker of images should therefore be meditative. Besides meditation there is no other way of knowing the character of an image—even direct observation is of no use). Images were made of sands, pastes, paints, enamels, earth, woods, stones and metals and are strong in succession. (*Sukraniti*, p.167-8).

The king is advised to set up such images in the kingdom, and should every year perform festivals in their honour. He should never keep in the temple images broken or made according to false measurements. He should also repair carefully the gods and temples. He should always worship the gods and see the entertainments in their honour but never apply his mind to self-enjoyment. The king should also celebrate the festivals that are observed by the people, and should enjoy happiness when they are happy and be aggrieved when they are in grief. Amusements and entertainments on the occasions of the festivals are consecrated to the gods—should not be regarded as means of self-enjoyment. Here is the very spirit of Hindu Sociology which makes everything human an offering to the gods and the whole life a perpetual consecration to their service. The king should "sympathise and take part in the folksongs and popular festivals also. (*Sukraniti*, p. 182)

Sukraniti gives in detail the skill and discrimination required of the employer for the selection of proper men for tasks for which they are fit. Everything has its own use. "There is no letter (of alphabet) which bears no charm; there is no root (of plants) that possesses no medicinal properties. So also there is no man who is (utterly) unfit. But the rarity is the person who can connect". These lines contain the general truth that there is nothing in the world that is absolutely useless. The greatest difficulty is to find out the man who can make proper use of these things in the universe, create mantras by connecting the letters of the alphabet, discover medicines by finding out the relation of plants with human bodies. (*Sukraniti*, p.77).

The kernel of truth that *Sukraniti* establishes for the success of organisations, and what all responsible men should regard as the first principle is the maxim, 'Give each man his proper work'—the combiner, connecter, the man who can discover the relations existing between bodies, and hence the effects of various sets of juxtapositions. Various classes of

rules and regulations of life are here enumerated. There cannot be a uniform standard for moral conduct,—it is implied. It must vary according to place, time, and circumstances. (*ibid.*).

Sukraniti does not recommend the ordinary rules of morality and religion to be followed in political affairs. It advocates prudence and diplomacy, the theory of trying to do the best under the circumstances, and to always adapt oneself to the varying conditions in the society. This is to a ruler the sole religion, the sole truth, any other thing would be irreligion, untruth. Hence according to *Sukraniti* so-called irreligion, immorality, inconsistency, and untruth which are the characteristics of *kutaniti* should not at all deter the king from a course of action that would lead to the desired object. The wise man should be indifferent to fame and name, and never think of glory and honour in achieving his ends. It should be his policy rather to suffer or welcome or invite insult and ignominy for sometime in order that social welfare may triumph in the end. (*Sukraniti*, p.253).

Transcendentalised Positivism

For Sarkar, sociology does not seek to know the passed forms of civilization with the sole end of knowing them and reconstructing them. But rather, like every positive science, it has as its object the explanation of some actual reality which is near to us, and which consequently is capable of affecting our ideas and our acts: this reality is man, and more precisely, the man of to-day, for there is nothing which we are more interested in knowing. Then we are not going to study a very ancient social system simply for the pleasure of telling its peculiarities and its singularities. If we have taken it as the subject of our research, it is because it has seemed to us better adapted than any other to lead to an understanding of the present nature of man, that is to say, to show us an essential and permanent aspect of humanity.

Sarkar thinks that the cheapest and most superficial view of Hindu civilization is that it is absolutely non-materialistic and ultra-spiritual. An excessive dose of pessimistic religiosity and an utter disregard of material interests are glibly talked of as the characteristic features of the Hindus. This interpretation of Hindu temperament is, however, not at all borne out by facts of history. Sarkar considers it strange that the Hindus should have been regarded so long as a purely non-political and non-economic or even a pre-political and pre-economic race in spite of the thousand and one evidences of a rich social and material life furnished by architectural, sculptural, numismatic and literary records.

It is unfortunate that sufficient attention has not been drawn to the study of *Niti-Shastras*, *Shilpa-Shastras*, *Vastu-Shastras*, *Kama-Shastras*, and other treatises on polity, warfare, town-planning, administrative machinery and financial management,

arts and crafts, hygiene, sanitation, eugenics, etc. Or, again, the idea that one gets from a study of the palaces, temples, forts, irrigation works, tanks, roads, etc., that testify to the engineering skill of the Indians in ancient and mediaeval times; for that alone is sufficient to dispel the erroneous theory about the genius of the civilization that has grown on Indian soil.

Sarkar used the term “Transcendentalized Positivism” (Positive Background, p.7) for the Indian ideal of synthesis and harmony of universal and particular. Sarkar saw in the *Smriti*, *Niti*, *Artha*, *Silpa* and *Vastu* literature, the same vigour in social life, the practical and positive outlook, and the emphasis on “moral duties” that characterizes the *Shruti* literature in the *Vedas* and *Upanisads*, whose ambition is no less than that of connecting with not only the “lithosphere from sea to sea, but also the atmosphere and the skies”, and realization of the transcendental in and through the positive. (ibid. p.15). This unity and diversity between the human and the spiritual is the fundamental bedrock of Indian sociology.

As Radhakrishnan, a contemporary of Sarkar, also emphasized, “The Upanisads do not ask us to renounce life, do not taboo desires as such. The false asceticism which regards life as a dream and the world as an illusion, which has obsessed some thinkers in India as well as in Europe, is foreign to the prevailing tone of the Upanisads. A healthy joy in the life of the world pervades the atmosphere. To retire from the world is to despair of humanity and confess the discomfiture of God. “Only performing works one should desire to live a hundred years.” There is no call to forsake the world, but only to give up the dream of its separate reality. We are asked to pierce behind the veil, realise the presence of God in the world of nature and society. The Upanisad conception of the world is a direct challenge to the spiritual activity of man. A philosophy of resignation, an ascetic code of ethics, and a temper of languid world-weariness are an insult to the Creator of the universe, a sin against ourselves and the world which has a claim on us. The Upanisads believe in God, and so believe in the world as well”. (Radhakrishnan, p.95).

It is sure to convince the most critical student of history that the Hindus had their forte not only in transcendental and metaphysical speculations, but also in the management of the affairs of this earthly earth, the administration of material interests and the supply of the necessaries, comforts and luxuries of life. The evidences are certainly not exhaustive, but they do indicate the great zest that the Hindus have ever felt in enjoying community and collective life as opposed to merely individualistic and exclusive, making it thoroughly social, sweet, and comfortable, and undoubtedly prove that pessimism is not the stuff out of which the Indian mind is made. The folklore of the Hindus is nothing but the adaptation of their metaphysical culture to the life of the “man in the street”, and the interpenetration of the simpler systems of thought and

activity with the conceptions of a higher system of Life-values and Life-attitudes. (Folk Elements, p.114-15).

For Sarkar, it is the objective of the Positive Background to demonstrate that Hindu culture bears testimony to both the natural impulse or drive of man and the given order of things. All the activities and ideas of the Hindus in regard to the mother earth, and the establishment of heaven on earth and the discovery of the eternal in the ephemeral or the transient are so many phases of Hindu positivism which it is the purpose of the present work to unravel. And this analysis leaves no doubt about the supreme value of each element in our personality. In his examination of Hindu society and culture the orientations derived from the self are as "real" as those from the "not-self." This duality remains irreducible as the immanent law of our being. The two terms, fundamental but antithetic, are equally legitimate and valid. (Positive Background, p. 26).

Equally acceptable to him is another viewpoint, namely, the one to the effect that the "economic man" is no more the whole man than is the "religious man," the "ethical man" etc. Extra-economic actions cannot be ignored in the examination of the complete personality. In regard to logical purposes, it is possible to be "analytical." But practice is essentially synthetic. It is the synthetic view that we stands for, and, that is the factual reality of Indian history and Hindu culture. (Positive Background, p. 24)

The entire reality is to be referred equally to both these principles. Each one dominates and embraces the other but does not definitely eliminate it, because in its turn is dominated by and comprised in the other. Such idealism as is pragmatic enough to recognize the equal validity of diverse factors or elements in our conscience and actions, as does not consider any single motive by itself to be sufficient for human life and refuses to recognize in this or that particular tendency the intimate essence or supreme law of human nature can be affiliated to the philosophy underlying the structure of the Positive Background as presented here. (Positive Background, p. 26).

That Hindu culture could have expressed itself in an objective philosophy of energism and positivism would, therefore, appear paradoxical to those who have been taught to know India only in her subjective metaphysics of mysticism. Strictly speaking, each view represents 'the truth, and nothing but the truth,' but not 'the whole truth;' for 'we are but parts and can see only but parts.' The travellers of ancient and medieval times, and scholars of the modern world, have certainly seen only parts, because they came to see only parts. They were specialists whose objective was to study only particular interests. The whole India is an organic synthesis of the two philosophies of positivism and mysticism. That synthesis cannot be interpreted fully by bringing about a mechanical adjustment of the conflicting reports of travellers and scholars. For unbiased students of

history, however, that is the only framework through which the signs of life and social reality have to be read. (Chinese Religion, p. 227).

The combination of sacrifice with enjoyment, the harmonising of sanyasa and asceticism with Samsara and attachments, the intermixture of Nivritti or highest spiritual self-realisation with Pravritti or pursuit of pleasure in life, the perception of the Infinite in the finite, freedom in law, and the blending of duties with rights are, in fact, the permanent and essential features of that Transcendental Positivism, that Idealism and Supernaturalism in the interests of the actual and natural, that sense of other-worldliness for the practical good of this world and the happiness of man that characterise the national life and literature of the Hindus , and are embodied in their social institutions. (*Sukraniti*, p.42-43).

The enumeration of the 64 arts (kala) and 20 sciences (vidya) given in *Sukraniti* together constitute a graphic account of the actual social life the people of India lived in those times. Sarkar says that after going through this one can hardly believe that the Hindus were a race of abstract metaphysicians who were negligent of the actual needs of the society cultivated the art of preparing for the next life only. One would rather think that they knew how to enjoy life and supply its necessities, comforts and decencies. Economically speaking, they were as self-sufficient as any people could possibly be, and made their material and secular life as comfortable and happy as possible. And intellectually speaking, they were competent enough to investigate not only the highest truths of the universe—the eternal problems of existence, but also to study and discuss all those branches of learning which had for their aim the practical furtherance of social ends—the amelioration of human life. (*Sukraniti*, p.160).

The more one studies the social, economic, political and other social aspects of the civilization of the Hindus as given in *Sukraniti*, the more one is impressed with the fact that their institutions were adequate for all the ends of human existence. (ibid.). Sarkar writes that the eternal combination of the human and superhuman is the fundamental bedrock of Hindu Sociology and is never forgotten by poets like Rabindra Nath Tagore and humanist and spiritual ‘world-conquerer’ like Vivekananda in their description of ideal society and individuals. The test and touchstone of true greatness among the Hindus are the approximation in life and thought, to such ideals of humanity as are suggested by the phrases ‘ he enjoyed happiness without attachment,’ and ‘thy right is only to the work, never to the fruits’. (*Sukraniti*, p.51-52).

Sarkar mentions the collection of prose-lyrics, dealing with the synthesis of the world’s eternal opposites or dualities, ‘Sadhana’ of Rabindranath Tagore. The book brings out the Hindu ideal of harmony between the finite and the infinite, bondage and freedom, necessity or law and joy. “The immortal being manifests himself in joy-form”. “The joy which is without form must create, must translate itself into forms”. It is this ideal,

again, that is at once the inspiration and message of most of Tagore's poetry, which thus carries forward the transcendentalized positivism of the makers of Hindu civilisation through the ages "along fresh fields and pastures new" of modern thought. The philosophy of reconciliation between the so-called evil and good, the form and spirit, the image and the infinite has thus uttered itself in mystical verse :

"The spirit wants to get a body in the midst of forms.
The form wants to get loose in the midst of spirit.
The infinite desires the intimate contacts of the finite.
The finite desires to get lost in the midst of the infinite."

(Positive Background, p.7).

Tagore himself wrote that, "Some modern philosophers of Europe, who are directly or indirectly indebted to the Upanishads, far from realising their debt, maintain that the Brahma of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world. In a word, that the Infinite Being is to be found nowhere except in metaphysics. It may be, that such a doctrine has been and still is prevalent with a section of our countrymen. But this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realising and affirming the presence of the infinite in all things which has been its constant inspiration". (Tagore, p.11).

The fundamental unity of creation was not simply a philosophical speculation for India; it was her life-object to realise this great harmony in feeling and in action. The earth, water and light, were necessary to her in the attainment of her ideal of perfection, as every note is necessary to the completeness of the symphony. Thus the text of our everyday meditation is the *Gayathri*, a verse which is considered to be the epitome of all the Vedas. By its help we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit, whose power creates the earth, the sky, and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world. (Tagore, pp. 4-5).

Sarkar considered Vivekananda as one of the "world-conquerors" of India. "With five words he conquered the world when he addressed men and women as "Ye divinities on earth, — Sinners ?" The first four words thundered into being the gospel of joy, hope, virility, energy and freedom for the races of men, and yet with the last word, embodying as it did a sarcastic question, he demolished the whole structure of soul-degenerating, cowardice-promoting, negative, pessimistic thoughts. On the astonished world the little five-word formula fell like a bomb-shell. The first four words he brought from the East, and the last word he brought from the West. All these are oft-repeated expressions, copy-book phrases both in the East and the West. And yet never in the annals of human thought was the juxtaposition accomplished before Vivekananda did it in this dynamic

manner and obtained instantaneous recognition as a world's champion". (*Creative India*, p. 672-78).

"The words that are constantly on Vivekananda's lips are the Upanisads and the Vedanta. These philosophical documents of ancient India appeal to him simply because they can be utilized as texts of his own cult of bhakti, energy, individuality and manhood". Vivekananda was not the man to appreciate his great French contemporary, the sociologist Durkheim. According to Durkheim the life of the individual is almost tyrannically "determined" by the "society". "Vivekananda is the farthest removed from the man of "closed systems" or of settled facts. He is the man to open the questions closed and unsettle the settled conventions, dogmas, doctrines and norms". "It is the example of the sun whose eternal movements inspired the Vedic philosophers to the doctrine of *charaiveti* or Wanderlust. In Vivekananda's declaration of war against the contemporary theories we encounter once again the same age-long Hindu philosophy of mobility and vital dynamics". (ibid.).

Conclusion

Sarkar was wary of theories. His multifaceted scholarship constantly took him from one field of inquiry to another. His amazingly wide range of interests stood in the way of the development of a tightly-knit logical system in sociology. He wrote on varied topics and the boundaries between diverse disciplines tended to get blurred. He was right when he said that, "It is a matter of common experience that there is no one word which can explain all the multifarious thoughts and activities of even a small group of human beings whom we can watch every day". (*Chinese Religion*, p. 34).

Sarkar believed that scholars have their own concepts and theories about the ideally best form of religion, as they have also their own ideas of the ideally best form of government. Indologists are, therefore, ever anxious to know what was the formula or catchword by which the Vedic Hindus tried to express their religious notions. Was it polytheistic, monotheistic, pantheistic, henotheistic, anthropomorphic, naturalistic, animistic or what? The Indian pioneers of world's culture did not care for a formula at all. People of Vedic India were essentially the worshippers of Nature. What they cared for most was Life, and what they feared most was the enemy of Life, both natural and human. "They were thus looking through Nature up to Nature's God. Their religion was fundamentally the handmaid of Life and hence coincided fully with what we call culture". (*Chinese Religion*, p. 35).

The complex web of Indian life and culture with its historic background of hoary past presents ceremonies, customs, and institutions which well-nigh defy the attempts of the anthropologist, sociologist, or the philosophical historian at anything like a systematic

and satisfactory account of their sources and careers. For a proper interpretation of the institutions and practices obtaining in India at the present day the scientist has thus to lay under consideration the data of archaeology, ecology, as well as ethnology. But the study of Indian social facts and phenomena is yet in its nascence. We are yet in the stage of collecting materials about the manifold aspects of our socio-economic, socio-religious, and socio-political usages and theories. The science of Indian sociology is only in the making. (Folk Element, p.1).

No one hypothesis or theory dominated Hindu thought in any age, or monopolized the researches of all investigators in successive epochs. The intellectual universe of the Hindus was “pluralistic.” There were different schools criticizing, correcting, and modifying one another’s enquiries. The story of scientific investigation among the Hindus is thus, like that among other nations, the story of a growth and development in critical inquiry, sceptical attitude, and rationalism”, (Creative India, p. 21-22). At that stage of social inquiry, Sarkar found it quite unscientific to pass anything but tentative and provisional remarks, on any of the institutions in India that have obtained currency in the past or are influencing life and thought in the present. The same tentative, provisional character also pertained to his comments on what in Europe and America had been passing for the science of sociology.

For Sarkar, “It bespeaks an unscientific or prepossessed turn of mind to speak of a certain people as the chosen race of God or to assert that certain manly virtues are the monopoly of a certain people on the strength of social studies confined within certain boundaries of the Western world. The interests of humanity and comparative literature, philosophy, art and sociology require the inhibition of preconceived notions about colour, race or climate”. (Folk Element, p.2). For Sarkar, Indian sociology can claim validity as creative knowledge if it remains in touch with the positive and festive reality of Indian society.

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